

The War on the North-West Frontier of India.

A Prelude to the War against the Soviet Union.

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The savage war that is being waged by the MacDonald Government against the independent tribes of the North-West Frontier of India deserves the closest attention of the workers of the world. European imperialism has conducted a number of such wars during the last twelve years, as e. g., the French and Spanish wars against the Moroccans, the French war against the Druses in Syria, the Italian war in Tripolis, the British attack on the Arabs of Palestine and on the Nubar tribes in the Sudan. But the present campaign on the North-West Frontier of India is of even greater importance because of its immediate connection with the coming war that is being planned by British imperialism against the Soviet Union.

Wars on that Frontier are nothing new in the history of British imperialist aggression. Between 1858 and 1922, according to the Simon Commission's Report just issued, there have been no less than 72 "military expeditions", i. e., an average of one war every year, against those freedom-loving tribes, whom British imperialist propaganda has systematically stigmatised as "wild", "unruly" and "barbarous", in order to create moral justification for its wanton attacks on their liberty. As far as the tribes themselves are concerned, they have hitherto successfully resisted every attempt to reduce them to subjection, although regiments recruited from among them have taken part in Britain's wars abroad and they have often made themselves feared during their raids into India by plundering Indian peasants and shopkeepers.

But the general revolt of the tribes that is now in progress shows three new characteristics that were entirely absent in previous wars with the British. Firstly, the offensive of the tribes aims at the overthrow of British imperialism altogether and not merely at preserving their own liberty. Secondly, the tribes are acting for the first time in solidarity with the Indian masses, as is shown by the complete absence of looting and by their armed support of the Indian revolutionaries in Peshawar, Kohat and other towns of the Panjab frontier. Thirdly, there are for the first time signs of a revolutionary movement among the tribes themselves, as is shown by the organisation of their youth in the "Red Shirts".

While this remarkable development is due to their miserable economic condition and to the growing agrarian discontent throughout the North-West, it has undoubtedly been stimulated also by the ideological influence exercised by the very existence of the Soviet Union.

Before the War, the enormous military and secret service expenditure, the unproductive and costly network of strategic railways in the North-West, the numerous wars and military expeditions against Afghanistan and the independent tribes, were all justified by the British imperialists on the ground of the "Russian menace", i. e., the imperialist expansion of Tsarist Russia into India. The clash between the two rival imperialist powers was averted by robber agreements in 1907 regarding "spheres of influence" in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. But war and revolution swept Tsarist Russia out of existence, and its place has been taken by a free Russia that is a standing warning to all imperialist oppressors and a message of liberty to the oppressed nations. To this free Russia of the workers and peasants, enslaved India is a danger. It is the British menace to Soviet Russia that has to be realised and fought against by the workers of the world, and they must therefore not only give their most active support to the Indian revolution but make special efforts to paralyse the whole military apparatus that is being set in motion on the North-West Frontier.

The British imperialists, however, still continue their cry of the "Russian menace", so as to mobilise support for their war plans among the Indian propertied class. How far this imperialist propaganda has effected the thought of the "educated" Indian is shown by the following statement made by Professor B. G. Sapse in discussing the question of the

"defence" of India on the North-West Frontier in his recent book on the Indian Constitution:

"The danger of Soviet Russia beyond Afghanistan is as imminent as ever. The agents and emissaries of that Government have been continually busy, and it is difficult to foresee what the ultimate consequences will be of their revolutionary and mischievous propaganda."

As a matter of fact, every effort is being made by British imperialism to show that the movement of the tribes has been directly engineered by the Soviet Government. The suggestion was made in the proclamation of May 12th of the Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province to the tribal chiefs. And the thought was uppermost in the mind of the Liberal M. P., Dr. Burgin, when in the debate on Soviet Russia on June 6th in the House of Commons he declared:

"If Moscow, in spite of being aware of the feeling in the House of Commons and in the country, systematically attempts to spread discontent among the tribes and the peasants on the North-West Frontier of India, the British Foreign Minister must take steps to find a remedy."

It is clear that the "forward schools" of imperialists are seeking a pretext for their war preparations against the Soviet Union, and the present campaign against the tribes has given them the opportunity of using their Air Force and bombing-planes as a training and a rehearsal for the coming War.

That the "epoch-making changes" to be introduced in the Indian Army by the new Commander-in-Chief, Sir Philip Chetwode, who is succeeding Sir William Birdwood, are directed against Soviet Russia, is frankly asserted by Wilson, formerly Editor of the semi-official "Pioneer" of Allahabad and now Editor of the "Indian Daily Mail" of Bombay, who is known to have very close connections with authoritative men in military circles. The new Commander-in-Chief is said to represent a more "modern school" than the retiring chief. He and his staff are of the opinion that "the danger to India (!) from beyond the North-Western Frontier can no longer be met in the old way". In the issue of April 4th, Wilson writes:

"The idea of mobile columns penetrating into the passes and supported with various lines of defence does not find favour with the new type of soldier. The plan which will be put into operation will have as its main feature a flanking base at Karachi, with a light extremely mobile fringe of defence troops on the edge of the passes, while the principal method of defence will be an attack on the communications of the enemy in Afghanistan and beyond from the air. This is of course assuming that Russia is the enemy."

In addition to this, arrangements are to be made for efficient gas drilling and for bottling gas in large quantities on the Frontier, for, as Wilson writes, "if ever there was a place which could be bottled up with gas, it is the Frontier."

In view of the fact that the principal weapon employed against the Soviet Union will be attacks from the air not only from the Indian frontier with Karachi as the air-base, but from the Western Border States, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Rumania, the present war on the Frontier where hundreds of aeroplanes have been bombing the tribes with thousands of pounds of explosives is of more than usual significance. The workers of the world and particularly the British workers should hinder the manufacture and transport not only of guns, warships and troops to India, but also of aeroplanes, aeroplane parts and gas which are to play so deadly a part in the plan for the destruction of the Workers' and Peasants' Republic.